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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an expanded definition of the concept of emotional giftedness in children as defined by Annemarie Roeper. In contrast to examples of academic and artistic prodigies, cases are reviewed that illustrate less tangibly measured examples of children's giftedness, such as expressions of compassion, moral sensitivity, positive maladjustment, loyalty, resistance to victimization, forgiveness, awareness of an inner life, genuine life of prayer, and the realization that all the answers lie within. Roeper's original concept is further expanded to include spiritual giftedness, the special affinity for inwardness and a natural aptitude for spiritual awakening. (Contains 19 references.) (CR)

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EMOTIONAL GIFTEDNESS: AN EXPANDED VIEW

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We live in an age of prodigies. Young pianists, violinists, even cellists, age 10, 12, or 14 perform brilliantly and movingly with the world's great orchestras. Others enter college and complete a Ph.D. or M.D. before their age mates graduate from high school. Rarest of all, two accomplished painters, one in China and one in the U.S., were recognized even before they were 10 years old. A concert performance, a work of art, an advanced degree are easy to notice and applaud. When it comes to gifts of the heart—empathy, compassion, forgiveness, or defending others—the situation is different. There is no wide audience and no TV camera to record and broadcast accomplishment in the emotional sphere, what Annemarie Roeper called being *emotionally* gifted. This paper expands on Roeper's original concept to include the sense of justice, moral sensitivity, positive maladjustment, loyalty, resistance to victimization, forgiveness, and spiritual giftedness.

Emotional Giftedness and Positive Maladjustment

There are children and adolescents, in ordinary classrooms, who stand up for a child who is teased or threatened. One girl, upset with her teacher's unfair treatment of another child, took her own paper, tore it to pieces and threw it in the waste basket to show her moral outrage at the teacher's prejudice. There are mediators and peacemakers. Terry, a gifted 4th grader was a natural leader but when working in groups he often held back so that others could shine. One day he defended an "at risk" student. This boy received a black eye in a wrestling tournament. The other boys teased him about the incident and embarrassed him. Terry told them, "you all know it was an accident so drop the subject." His tone was so sincere and authoritative that the boys ceased their teasing (Charbonneau, personal communication). One high school student, during a class project, took special care to take into consideration ideas of the students who were quiet or different and unpopular. He also resisted to join in teasing them.

Instances of empathy, unselfishness, and consideration for others are readily found but are either unnoticed or are hidden in the heart. From her experience as a teacher's aide, Seymour (1987) described a 7-year old boy who was considered average in school because he tended not to command attention and yet, given the opportunity, he was full of questions and intense interest in everything around him. The boy had great imagination, sensitivity, and appreciation of beauty. He saw that Seymour was paying special attention to him so he suggested that she

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start going to play at other children's homes; he even offered to take her to the house of a classmate who lived on his street. He did not want to keep this wonderful special attention all to himself. From responses to her parent questionnaire, Silverman (1993) collected numerous observations of emotional sensitivity, compassion, and moral sensitivity in gifted children as young as $2^{1}/_{2}$ and 3.

Anthony Godby Johnson (1994, p. 140) recalled crying as a boy of 10 when he heard of the death of the principal who showed him kindness. Entering preschool at 5 Tony stuttered and had a lisp. The speech therapist recommended that he be placed in a special program. His parents took this as a personal affront. Tony was beaten for embarrassing them. Feeling helpless and worthless he stopped talking. The principal noticed it. One day when Tony was hurt in the schoolyard and got a bleeding nose, this principal lovingly cleaned him, stopped the bleeding, and told him many times he was special. After a while Tony started talking and improved his speech which got him accelerated into first grade. Five years later Tony learned that this principal was dismissed when the administration found that he was HIV-positive. Recalling this man's kindness and caring, and reflecting on the injustice of his dismissal, Tony wrote: "I wasn't sure whether I cried for him or because no one said anything truly kind. I wondered if this was just a small introduction to the world I was going to grow up in—a world of cold and judgmental indifference that left no room for anything special. I was suddenly afraid of what kind of man I would grow up to be."

Strongly felt empathy readily moves to action. Heather Tobis Booth, co-director of Citizen Action in Chicago recalled how she first encountered injustice; her reaction was instantaneous (Witty, 1990):

> *The first happened when I was in first grade at P.S. 200. I arrived in the schoolyard one morning and saw a little black boy named Benjamin surrounded by some other kids. They were picking up stones and starting to throw them, because they believed he had stolen this girl's lunch money. I ran up to him and stood beside him. And they stopped. I remember thinking something like "you don't treat people like this." The teacher apparently either witnessed this or heard about it. When I was in high school, she came to see me and reminded me of this incident.*

Strong empathy may move a youngster to personal sacrifice. A highly gifted high school student decided that after graduation he was not going to the university but to work with the homeless. A 16-year old pimp and a thief, also highly gifted, was picked up with two friends for some illegal gang activities. There was not enough evidence to sent him in jail but enough for his friend. Nevertheless, he incriminated himself. He said: "We were good friends, hugging friends, and we did for each other. I knew he'd have trouble there without me. The fact is, he found it real hard and kept wanting us to run away. But I'd talk him out of it" (Rubin, 1996, p. 203). When a friend of Charleszetta Waddles, founder of the Perpetual Mission for Saving Souls of All Nations in Detroit, was in danger of losing her house for lack of mortgage payments, she left her apartment and moved with her children into the woman's basement—a space which was not

even divided into rooms. By this move she could give her friend all her rent money to meet the mortgage payments (Colby & Damon, 1992).

Because they have a strong sense of justice, emotional awareness and sensitivity to the feelings and the hurt of others, gifted children and adolescents are often at odds with the adults' assumed rights because of their status and authority. Again Heather Tobis Booth:

> *Another incident happened when I was in third grade. The teacher got really angry and lost her temper with this boy named Angelo. She was actually banging his head against the wall. I stood up and told her to stop, that she shouldn't do this. She was then angry and outraged with me because I had the nerve to do this.*

Roeper (1982) drew attention to what makes these young people stand out: they dare to act on their awareness. Gifted adolescents in particular, with their advanced thinking, see through pretense and double standards. Often they meet with opposition and ridicule. Not compromising one's ideals, resisting peer pressure, and being able to stand alone, Dabrowski (1970) called *positive maladjustment*. It is positive because it means being true to oneself and to the universal ideals of compassion, caring, and to the idea that each individual deserves consideration. Grounded in empathy and a sense of justice, such stance is often in opposition to others' self-interest, prejudice, and ruthlessness. Therefore the two terms, *emotional giftedness* and *positive maladjustment* overlap.

Standing by one's beliefs and ideals is a common experience for gifted teens. Here are a few examples picked from responses to the Overexcitability Questionnaire (Piechowski, 1979). A 16-year old student was asked the question *How well do you like being all by yourself?* She replied:

> *Depends—all on the circumstances. I can take standing alone—if I have to. I spent seven years of my life (almost 7) as a social outcast because I refused to conform to some demands of my society or couldn't conform to others—I'm not at all likely to be afraid of ostracism now. As far as being alone from time to time just to have a few quiet moments, I find I not only enjoy it but need it. There are just definitely times when I don't want to see anyone but myself.*

To be true to oneself may indeed require a person to stand alone at times. The following are three replies from students who were asked *What situations bring you in conflict with others?* A 16-year old girl said:

> *My opinions are quite different from other students my age. This many times brings conflict between someone in my class and myself. For example, many kids in my class don't think drinking is dangerous and I do. I don't believe in it and I believe it is a waste of time. This sometimes causes a hassle. Another thing my classmates disagree with me on is styles. Many students buy clothes because they are "in style." I don't. If I like them I get them, if I hate them I leave them at the store "in style" or not!*

A 17-year old girl replied in this way:

> [I am in conflict with others]*When other people become too demanding or try to tell me what to do, how to think, or what to feel. In a way which is not always good, I'm a little independent or stubborn for my own good – but the thing that I refuse to do is sacrifice my feelings for others just to be part of the crowd, and I can't stand doing something against my ideals. These things will bring me in conflict with others.*

A young woman of 18 reacted to her teachers' presumption of superiority:

> *Sometimes I'm in conflict with my teachers because I won't go along with their superiority complexes. I won't accept their ideas all the time and I hate when they come at me with them and I better accept them or get them wrong on a test. Sometimes I found that they would give their view on a certain subject yet wouldn't listen to what my view is, for of course theirs is right.*

Here are replies, two years apart, from a boy confronted with asking himself, *Who am I?* When he was 15 he wrote: "I feel that I am a person who is on the earth that is destined to use his abilities and talents to his fullest. This is simply what I think I really am." He gave it much thought over the next two years. At 17 he recognized a moral conflict between getting ahead and being considerate of others:

> *The answer to this question has changed over the past few years. A few years ago I was a person who wanted things for himself. Now I am trying to change that person to a person who wants to contribute to others and the world not just himself. Obtaining this type of person in this world is not that easy. The one thing that is a roadblock is competition. Not necessarily losing to other people, but beating them. How can I compete to get into medical school when a doctor is supposed to build people's confidence and restore their sense of security? The process is self-defeating.*

It is not hard to see that this kind of thinking guided the lives of Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Peace Pilgrim, and many others who follow their inner voice. When about hundred years ago Gandhi started his law practice, his goal was to resolve conflicts rather than to win cases for one side only. He implemented the win-win principle:

> *I felt that my duty was to befriend both parties and bring them together. I strained every nerve to bring a compromise.... [In the end] both were happy over the result, and both rose in public estimation. My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder.* (Gandhi, 1948/1983, p. 117).

Has Gandhi's approach been ignored? Perhaps it had to be rediscovered.

Peace Pilgrim, who in 1953 began a 25,000-mile pilgrimage on foot—it took 11 years to

complete – expressed how world peace can be achieved by working in harmony and connectedness with others:

> *We are all cells in the body of humanity. We are not separate from our fellow humans.... It's only from that higher viewpoint that you can know what it is to love your neighbor as yourself. From that higher viewpoint there becomes just one realistic way to work, and that is for the good of the whole. As long as you work for your selfish little self, you're just one cell against all those other cells, and you're way out of harmony. But as soon as you begin working for the good of the whole, you find yourself in harmony with all of your fellow human beings. You see, it's the easy, harmonious way to live.* (Peace Pilgrim, 1982, pp. 18–19)

The boy, who wondered how he could be a helper and a healer when at the same time he was expected to defeat others in competition, arrived on his own at the same understanding as Peace Pilgrim.

Her message of peace was simple: "Overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love." She stressed that there is nothing new about it, only the practice of it! Peace Pilgrim kept on walking for another 17 years. Her principles, which she wrote up in *Steps Toward Inner Peace*, inspired a group of lawyers to replace litigation with mediation. After more than 20,000 cases they reported a consistent 80 percent rate of success. Remarkably, the success rate was independent of the person of the mediator (see the 1995 documentary *The Spirit of Peace*).

Positive maladjustment leads to action. Pleasing others and seeking their acceptance may be desirable, at the same time it may conflict with what one believes is right, for instance to be self-directed rather than directed by others.

Peace Pilgrim took this stance in grammar school when she refused to smoke cigarettes with her classmates; in high school she withstood the pressure to drink alcohol. She said to them: "Look, life is a series of choices and nobody can stop you from making your choices, but I have a right to make my own choices, too. And I have chosen freedom."

Heather Tobis Booth did not fit in high school even though she tried:

> *There were sororities in the high school. At first I pledged, and then I realized they didn't allow blacks in the sororities, and didn't allow people that didn't look a certain way or who were poor in the sororities, and it was like "this is just too stupid," and so I rejected the sorority. There was a scandal around that and everything I did. Though I so desperately wanted to fit in, believing the things I believed, just as a human being, meant I couldn't fit in. So I was enormously torn and very unhappy.*
>
> *If I said what I believed in a history class, they would say, "only communists believe that." And I would think, "my God, this is the worst thing*

in the world. What is a communist?" I liked Pete Seeger records, and he was a "communist." I couldn't communicate things I felt so deeply about, because anything I felt deeply about was, for some reason or other, forbidden. I mostly spent my time trying to escape.

Intellectually gifted and emotionally intense adolescents who are blocked in expression of what they deeply feel become depressed. Jackson's (1995) study of depression showed these adolescents to have a strong need for communion with others, for understanding and knowledge, and for active participation in the world—to work for the larger good. Lack of channels of expression and opportunities for action is very disturbing to them. Like most people they like to associate with others with whom they can share insights and ideas. They are, as Maslow said of self-actualizing people, hungry for their own kind. But being somewhat of a rare species, it is harder for them to find their own kind. This leads to a sense of isolation, and for some, the feeling of being an alien. In a vast majority of instances they are alone having to cope with it, not always successfully.

Standing Up for Justice and a Moral Order

Conscientious objectors, social reformers, religious leaders, whistle blowers, peace workers, and eco-heroes are those exceptional individuals who see clearly that exploitation of people is dehumanizing and must be stopped, that deprivation and poverty can be abolished, that poor health from malnutrition and lack of sanitary living conditions can be corrected, that instead of denying opportunity for lack of education and employment it has to be given, that our environment has to be respected for the limits of what it can sustain.

Conscientious objectors like Lt. Louis Font during the Vietnam war and Daniel Cobos, the first well known resister in the Air Force, were all alone when they came to the realization that they could no longer serve causes that were morally wrong. Lt. Louis Font was a distinguished graduate of West Point. He came from a family steeped in the tradition of patriotism to serve God and country. Contemplating the words of the cadet prayer for "sympathy for those who sorrow and suffer" he realized that it was the Vietnamese people who sorrowed and suffered, and that he was in the uniform of an army which was bringing sorrow and suffering to these people. No one helped him or supported him in making the decision to become a conscientious objector. By this decision he sacrificed his lifelong dream of a military career. He was within four months of earning his master's degree and he sacrificed that, too. He felt that he could not wait these few months to file after graduation because "it would have been insincere to wait." To stand alone, as he did to be true to himself, exacts a price. Because this brought him into direct conflict with the values around him, values that until that point were his as well, his decision is a clear instance of positive maladjustment (Piechowski, 1991).

From 1984 to 1987 air force sergeant Daniel Cobos flew on missions from the Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska to El Salvador and Panama. Such missions were strictly prohibited by

Congress once the nature of these missions was uncovered in 1985. During the Vietnam war Daniel Cobos accepted unquestioningly the justification of the war as needed for national security but the well publicized picture of a napalmed girl haunted him. In the 1980s he joined the air force as a translator. He was disturbed by the violent war images on the stained glass windows of the base chapel: "I felt like my Church was involving itself in something profane." But he enjoyed the company and friendship of his air force buddies. He was nominated "Airman of the Year." In Panama he was shocked by poverty of the people and the disregard for their lives by some of the airmen. He felt more affinity with the native people than with his military colleagues. He began having violent, blood-filled nightmares. It was not an easy process to decide to leave. When he applied for the status of conscientious objector he was stripped of his security clearance. Without the badge he was conspicuous, isolated, and grounded—he had to be escorted on the base. But he was not prepared for the hostility once his case became public. The Air Force was seeking ways to disqualify him on grounds of security violations and espionage. His attorney through this frightening time was Louis Font (Everett, 1986).

Everett describes nine other men who chose their careers out of the blend of patriotism, pride in their work, and desire to make a living. But in the end, they all left their careers in the military, weapons industry, CIA or foreign service—some very highly paid—convinced that their work was contributing to war, injustice, and oppression, rather than peace and freedom. Their patriotism and ethics forced them to find their own ways to work for peace.

Resistors of social and political evil tend to come from well-functioning supportive families that inculcate ethical principles into their children. The breaking of ranks has its origin in a feeling of betrayal of the sense of a moral order with which they grew up. A different, more painful and more lonely process takes place when the war is inside the family and the child is the enemy struggling for survival. There are people who come from dysfunctional families, even to the point of emotional malignancy, who are subject to years of severe physical and emotional abuse, who nevertheless endure, resist, and eventually create fulfilling lives for themselves.

Triumph over Persecution

The foundation of emotional development is the security of attachment between the parent and the child. This bond takes many years to develop, well into adolescence. When this bond is not secure, a life of anxiety and nagging emotional hunger may follow to obtain the love that was missing. If this bond is absent, as in neglect and rejection, then difficulties ensue in forming close relationships. But what happens when this bond is disrupted by abandonment, hostility, or severe physical and emotional abuse? Usually the child feels that he or she has done something to bring this on, feels guilty, and makes repeated attempts to win the favor of the toxic parent. However, in rare instances, the child is able to see that the abuse is undeserved and unjustified.

In its original formulation, the concept of emotional giftedness included awareness and sensitivity to the feelings of others, compassion for victims of injustice, and moving swiftly from feeling to action. However, there are situations which suggest that the concept should be

extended to include the capacity for emotional survival against all odds.

Dave Pelzer's (1995) childhood was happy until he was five when his mother underwent a radical change and began to engage in deadly games that centered entirely on him. He became the object of her wrath, the "bad boy" who had to be punished. The punishments progressed from beating to dislocation of his shoulder, the premeditated torture of depriving him of food, burning his arm on the gas stove, suffocating him with toxic ammonia fumes, and worse. He was banished to live in the basement and was not allowed to bathe so that children at school avoided him because of his bad odor. As hard as it is to believe, his father and his brothers looked on and did not come to his rescue; they were too afraid to cross this woman. Eventually, when on a number of occasions she ordered him to lie for hours in a tub filled with cold water, his nose barely reaching for air, his brothers would show him to their friends. They asked, "what has he done this time?" The brothers did not know. Dave Pelzer endured this torment for six years, surviving on occasional tiny victories. When he reached fifth grade he was rescued by the school nurse. The school did not allow him to go home but placed him in the custody of the San Mateo Juvenile Department. He was free. Twenty years later, in 1993 he was honored at the White House as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Americans. From victim he became victor. How that happened is to be to told in the second part of the three parts under the joint title *The Lost Boy*.

In *The Transcendent Child, Tales of Triumph Over the Past*, Lillian Rubin (1996) describes life histories of four men and five women—one of them is Rubin herself—who survived physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, or the indifference of their families. One case has a striking resemblance to David Pelzer's. A seven-year old girl from Finland was sold by her mother for adoption in America. When she was less than a year old her father died, the mother became depressed, started drinking and bringing men to the house. Karen suffered sexual abuse, but what made it more horrible was that the mother knew. Karen screamed for her mother to come to protect her but in vain. But she had an older brother with whom she was close and a kind grandmother with whom she stayed during the day.

The little girl spent five days on a Swedish ship alone, terrified and seasick. In America she was met by the adopting couple. She instinctively shrank from the woman. This woman, a powerful lawyer with political clout, well educated and cultured, chose the adopted girl as the object of her psychotic rage. She beat her and in school degraded her in front of her class. Karen was not allowed to eat with her new family. Although other people knew, including her adoptive father, nobody intervened. Karen's method of survival was to make a black box in her mind where she kept the images of her grandmother, her brother and her mother. At night, in her imagination, she would lift open the lid and look at these images. She kept hoping that someone from home would come for her. But she was told that no one in Finland had had any interest in seeing her again. Karen refused to believe it The persecution continued. At the age of 3 she separated from her body and floated to the ceiling immune to the punishment. Soon she found she could enter a dark tunnel at will and from there observe what was being done to her. Significantly, she somehow realized that the retreat to the tunnel held the danger of being stuck there so she stopped. When she was 12 a boy was adopted. She became attached to him and

tried to protect him. He was beaten too but never as much as Karen. Her warm feelings for him were instrumental in her own healing.

When Karen was fifteen she was cleaning the windows on the second story of the house, when her adopted mother lunged at her to push her out. But the girl managed to hold on and repel the attacker. Seized by fury she grabbed a broom and told her "Don't you ever touch me again." This ended the physical abuse but not the humiliations. After beginning college she managed to leave. It took help from others, two bad marriages, and one good one, before the major, though by no means complete, work of emotional healing was accomplished. She became a lawyer. The two boys in the family—the adoptive couple had a son of their own, younger than Karen—became psychological cripples, even the one Karen tried to protect.

The other lives described by Rubin are no less painful and dramatic. She searched for the common characteristics that enabled their emotional survival and growth toward well-being. The first was their ability to recognize, often quite early, that the mistreatment was unjustified. They felt different and marginal, and this helped them to dis-identify from the family. The second characteristic was that they were able to find alternative sources of support, even very small, of which they made the best use. They found ways of taking themselves out of the family by doing well in school, by developing totally different areas of interest, or by separating themselves in their mind the way Karen did. Their sense of marginality developed in them tolerance for loneliness.

When they left their families and started the long way toward healing their deep wounds, they all felt strongly they had a mission to help others. One was going to work with families. A scholar and writer, became a peacemaker. A musician developed his art so that he offered the listeners something beautiful and deeply moving every time he played. A pimp and thief—the one who went to jail to give moral support to his friend—became a college professor and was helping black youth to break the cycle of poverty and hopelessness. A wealthy woman became a feminist philanthropist inviting other women to contribute and take an active part. They triumphed over their severely painful and destructive past. Their capacity to benefit from help offered—they seem to draw others to themselves—made them seek opportunities to be of help to others.

Studies of vulnerability, risk, and resilience have uncovered a small proportion of children and adolescents who cope well with the stress and disorganization brought on by alcoholic, psychotic, and abusive parents. The methods of coping are similar to those described by Rubin. However, only one case is mentioned which is similar. This adolescent girl throughout her childhood and adolescence "remained composed to the point of serenity amidst the wildest accusations, insinuations, and attacks of her mother, as well as the equally disagreeable reverberations from her psychopathic father, who had a strong sadistic streak in his personality. She thrived scholastically, emotionally, and interpersonally." She had her own imaginary castle into which she could retreat, just like Karen into her tunnel, except that this girl's castle was a happy place, where she was the queen (Anthony, 1987).

Spiritual Giftedness

Lynne Halsted is another jewel in Rubin's collection. Born to an extremely wealthy family she lived in fear of her alcoholic mother's unpredictable and often uncontrollable rages. Lynne said; "When you are beaten at age $3\frac{1}{2}$ or 4 by someone who is clearly out of control, it leaves an indelible mark. You don't forget the sight of the bruises on your body because they leave marks on your soul" (Rubin, 1996, p. 72). When she was 5 her mother beat her for not memorizing precisely the Lord's prayer. Her thoughts were, *"I can't believe I'm punished for this*. Even then I understood that God couldn't care if I didn't get all the words right as long as he knew I was talking to him from my heart." She was tormented by her brother who was her mother's favorite yet she refused to be a helpless victim. She confided in her stuffed gorilla or did to him what was being done to her. She said: "I always felt like a space alien in my family. I never felt I belonged there from the time I was a very small child. When you've felt such a deep sense of being different so early on, an inner life develops at a very young age. Sam [the stuffed gorilla] helped me find my own way. My dialogues with him and with my inner self about being quite sure I was in the wrong place with the wrong family are very memorable to me" (Rubin, 1996, p. 73).

Her parents did not attend church but sent Lynne. "I was sent early on their behalf. I'll always be grateful for that. The sense of isolation I felt and the feeling of being so alien facilitated a soulful journey for some power that would lift me out of that place.... Going there was like finding a room of my own, the first place where I felt at home, where I could hear myself and listen to my inner life, and where I didn't feel unwelcome or threatened but instead was a valued member of the community. There was a kind of calm there that I knew nothing about before" (Rubin, 1996, pp. 78–79).

These few excerpts introduce another quality which further extends the concept of emotional giftedness to embrace spiritual giftedness. Her sense of her inner life, of the calm felt in church, and her understanding as a young child that God looks into the heart not to the words, all point to a spiritual intuition present at a very young age. Her sense of self appears well integrated long before adolescence.

Lynne felt that the life of emotional neglect amidst the privilege made her "enormously independent." Usually it is just the opposite, children grow into adults with dependency on material satisfactions or alcohol and drugs to appease the emotional hunger and dull the pain. She felt liberated when she was sent to a boarding school at 13. There she found acceptance and affirmation in a community of women. Gradually she developed a talent for leadership. Today she is a feminist philanthropist working with other women on charitable allocation of money because, she said, money is the women's last frontier. Her mother never approved of her and never understood her. Despite that Lynne has maintained contact with her.

No doubt, to forgive the tormentor is one of the hardest things to do. Poloma and Gallup (1991) report in *Varieties of Prayer*, from their personal knowledge, a couple who prayed daily to be able to forgive the man who murdered their 22-year old son. Eventually they were able to meet with the murderer and not only forgive him but extend their love to him and accept him as their own son.

Gal: A True Life is a story of Ruthie Bolton (1994) who lives in South Carolina. She was born in 1961 when her mother was 13. She had seen little of her mother who was always away but

each visit stood out in her memory. Some years later her mother was burned to death by a jealous man. Feeling abandoned and very angry, Ruthie decided to be a mean "tough nigger," and the children in school became afraid of her. She was raised by her grandparents. Her grandfather was a big, violent and mean man. His wife died of the injuries he inflicted on her. There was no investigation. He made the children his slaves. But he was most severe toward Ruthie. Her defense was not to let him see her cry which made the punishments all the more severe. Her grandfather seemed to reserve a special hatred just for her. The persecution brought her to actually try to kill him with berries she thought were poisonous. Eventually she managed to leave home, get work but also led a life of drugs and using men. She married and had a child but the child was taken away from her. Her second marriage brought her into a loving family. It was more than she could believe. All her past rage welled up in her and she put these people to test. Yet they still loved her, they would not get discouraged or dissuaded from loving her despite everything harsh and mean she did or said.

When her grandfather became old and sick she went back to take care of him. He no longer could bathe himself nor control his bowels. He never said one kind word to her. After his death she came to peace with him.

Rubin called the people who triumphed over their traumatic past *transcenders*. The participants in her study did not speak of forgiving. Yet some of them maintained some contact with the parents who were so cruel to them. They knew they were victimized but they did not see themselves as victims. To transcend a painful past, to open oneself to life, to not hold bitter feelings, to be able to forgive raises the question of how is this possible. Even moral exemplars, who inspired by compassion, genuine love for their fellow human beings, and strong religious faith dedicated their lives to helping others, say that they have to make an effort to be forgiving. Charleszetta Waddles, the Detroit giant waging war on poverty (her mission serves 100,000 people a year) said that the most difficult aspect of her work was to be able to forgive, time and again, "seventy times seventy," those who respond to her loving care with ingratitude, or by cheating or stealing from her. Yet this effort did not diminish her love nor her inexhaustible energy. Another missionary to the poor, Suzie Valadez, said "The Lord has given me a love for these people that I myself don't understand" (Colby & Damon, 1992).

Etty Hillesum, who perished in the Holocaust, through self-taught meditation developed an unexpected life of prayer that brought on an urge to kneel in reverence, as if her body was made to kneel (Hillesum, 1985). Peace Pilgrim (1982) found all the answers within herself which led her to an unshakable inner peace, radiant health and "energy that never runs out." Both Etty and Peace had no religious training to speak of, yet from within their inner being came a spiritual search. They discovered that "everything we need is within us" (Piechowski, 1993).

Coda

This paper reviewed case material illustrating expressions of compassion, moral sensitivity, positive maladjustment, resistance to victimization, loyalty, forgiveness, awareness of one's

inner life, genuine life of prayer, and the realization that all the answers lie within. Thus expanded, the concept of emotional giftedness acquires a broader range and greater complexity. Expanding it further to include spiritual giftedness—the special affinity for inwardness and a natural aptitude for spiritual awakening—brings us to the threshold of the mystery of deep, unshakable faith, the capacity for forgiveness, and the mystery of unconditional love that releases inexhaustible energy.

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